

SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS

Writing Division

CTWR 412: Introduction to Screenwriting

Section: 19168R

Syllabus, Fall 2016

GENERAL INFORMATION

Instructor:	Vincent Robert
Class Schedule:	Mondays, 4:00 PM – 6:50 PM
Class Location:	SCA 362
Office Hours:	Mondays from 2:00 pm to 3:45 pm BY APPOINTMENT ONLY.

Please text or email me to make an appointment at least 2 days ahead. If emailing, please indicate "APPOINTMENT REQUEST" in the subject line. Emails will be answered at earliest possible convenience whenever Instructor is in production.

I live far out of town and I regret that I can't be there any other day. I am, however, open to email questions or phone conferences. Email or text me in advance to set a time and we'll make it happen. When texting, make sure you identify yourself (name, 412 class, phone number) in the text, and I'll respond to your inquiry.

Contact Info: 310.994.4236 (cell)
scriptsystem@gmail.com (email)

COURSE OBJECTIVE

The objective of this course is to develop:

- A 3-4 pages non-dialogue screenplay. The completed script will count as the midterm for this course.
- A 10-20 pages screenplay with dialogue. This completed short script will be turned in during the last week of class and will count as the final for this course.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an introduction to the formal elements of writing a short script and aims to help prepare the student for CTWR 415. Topics covered will include:

- Overview:
 - Explore what is cinematic writing vs. prose writing.
 - Writing visually and sonically.
 - Developing your own voice as a writer.
 - Originality: How do you see life? People? The world? What kinds of stories attract you? How do you infuse them with your own memories and observations?
 - The screenwriting format.
- The art of storytelling:
 - Finding and developing ideas.
 - Finding stories for which you are passionate.
 - Understanding how theme is expressed through characters and plot.
 - Clarity in telling a story.
 - Understanding the economy of effective narrative screenwriting.
 - Using details to make stories come to life; the value of specifics.
- Character:
 - Why do we care about these people?
 - Understanding how to make an emotional connection with the audience.
 - Reveal character with action.
 - The human condition and how to incorporate that within a story.
 - The importance of a character's goal.
 - Believable characters.
- Plot and structure and their symbiotic relationship:
 - How it relates to character.
 - The building blocks of the story. What is a scene?

- Components that make up a scene.
- Conflict within a scene.
- Dialogue:
 - Finding the character's voice.
 - The craft of writing great dialogue
 - Handling and minimizing exposition.
 - Dialogue that is sharp yet conversational.
- Skills:
 - Finding one's unique writing style.
 - Developing strong outlines and/or treatments.
 - Learning to develop discipline as a writer and setting goals.

Method:

The above will be achieved through the reading and analyzing of scripts, the analysis of clips, the workshopping of weekly assignments in class and through participation in feedback.

Your classmates are your audience and you are theirs. Intelligent, constructive criticism is a requirement. Besides, it's uncanny how often a student will recognize in someone else's work the very problems he or she is struggling with in their own scripts. Because of this, your participation will be part of your grade.

COURSE READINGS

(available online or at the University Bookstore, Larry Edmunds, Samuel French, Hollywood Stationers, Amazon.com and other specialized bookstores)

David Howard & Edward Mabley, *THE TOOLS OF SCREENWRITING* (St-Martin's Press)

Dara Marks, *INSIDE STORY* (Three Mountain Press)

Margaret Mehring, *THE SCREENPLAY: a blending of film form and film content* (Focal Press). OUT OF PRINT BUT EXCELLENT IF YOU CAN FIND IT.

Jean-Paul Ouellette, *THE NEW ELEMENTS OF STANDARD SCREENPLAY FORMAT* (Yankee Classic Pictures).

And as many professional screenplays as you can! (available at the cinema library)

GRADING CRITERIA

Grading will evaluate creative content, professional presentation and growth through the semester, as well as the student's demonstration of his or her achievement of the course's objectives, as reflected in the following assignments or ones substituted in their place:

Atmosphere assignment	05%
Date assignment	05%
Character assignment	05%
Mid-Term script:	20%
Waking up assignment	05%
Pitch, Final Script	05%
Character, Final Script	05%
Treatment, Final Script	05%
First Draft, Final Script	15%
Final Draft, Final Script	20%
Participation in class, critiques, etc...:	10%

Assignments must be turned in by the deadline and in the delivery manner indicated in the Class Schedule.

MID TERM GRADES will be available by Mid-October.

There will be no final exam. **If you turn in all your work, if that work is on time, if it is competent, if you read the other students' works and consistently add to our class discussions, then you will earn no less than a "B".** Please refer to the School's standardized definition of grades. In summary:

- A: 100% to 94% -- **Outstanding** fulfillment of course requirements
- A-: 93% to 90% -- **Excellent** fulfillment of course requirements
- B+: 89% to 87% -- **Above-average** fulfillment of course requirements
- B: 86% to 83% -- **Good** fulfillment of course requirements
- B-: 82%-80% -- **Average** fulfillment of course requirements

- C+: 79% to 77% -- Work of fair quality
- C: 76% to 73% -- Opportunity for improvement in demonstrating “ownership” of concepts, in meeting deadlines, in participation.
- C-: 72% to 70%
- D+: 69% to 67%
- D: 66% to 63%
- D-: 62% to 60%
- F: 59% to 0% -- Failure to meet the minimum course requirements
- Incomplete: assigned only when work is not completed because of documented illness or other “emergency” **occurring after the 12th week** of the semester.

EXPECTATION OF PROFESSIONALISM

All material is expected to be turned in on time and in the proper format. Assignments will be penalized for grammatical mistakes, spelling errors, format mistakes, and typos. Please proof your assignment prior to submission.

All materials **MUST** be typed and emailed or printed.

Name every document you email the group as follows:

YourFirstName_Assignment.Format

Ex: Vincent_ScBreakdown.doc, or Vincent_ScriptDraft1.pdf

Also:

Save and send all your work as a PDF file.

When emailing a script, **NUMBER YOUR SCENES AND PAGE NUMBERS** before saving it as a PDF.

Put your **name** and **title** on the **COVER PAGE** of your material.

Refer to the SCHEDULE for due dates of assignments.

WRITING DIVISION ATTENDANCE POLICY

Students are expected to be on time and prepared for each class. Regular and punctual attendance is mandatory because of the workshop element of this class. Roll call will be taken at the beginning of each class.

Two unexcused absences will result in your grade being lowered by one full point (ex: A to a A-). A third unexcused absence will result in your grade being lowered another full point (ex: B to a B-). Your grade will be lowered by one point for every absence after. Two late arrivals equates to one full absence.

In order for absence to be excused the student must have **approval** from the professor and provide **documentation** at the next attended class session.

Please note that if you are a Writing for Screen and Television major / minor you must receive a grade of a C or better in order to receive degree credit. If you have any questions about the minimum grade required for credit please check with your home department.

If you have an emergency and must miss class please contact your professor prior to class or contact the Writing Division at 213.740.3303.

Excessive absences, excused or unexcused, will be cause to fail for the semester.

MISSING AN ASSIGNMENT, INCOMPLETES

The only acceptable excuses for missing an assignment or taking an incomplete in the course are personal illness or a family emergency. Students must inform the instructor before the assignment due date and present verifiable evidence in order for a make-up to be scheduled. Students who wish to take incompletes must also present documentation of the problem to the instructor before final grades are due.

Late assignments will be graded down each day late. 1 day an A becomes an A- , more than 3 days late is considered a 0 and you will fail the assignment. Please plan your time accordingly during the semester. You are expected to show the assignments you are working on each week for class feedback. Failure to turn in the final draft of the screenplay which you wrote during this semester leads to failing the course.

LAPTOP / TABLET / CELL PHONE POLICY

The use of technology to take notes or read each other's work is permitted in this class. Any use of a device that detracts from the class (such as surfing the Web for non class-related purposes, messaging or emailing, etc..., or doing work for other classes) will result in the loss of technology privileges for the student.

CLASS SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS

Please note that all dates and assignments are subject to change at the discretion of the Professor.

Unless otherwise modified by the Professor, all assignments are DUE on the day and time indicated here. IF YOU DON'T MEET THE DEADLINE, YOUR ASSIGNMENT MAY NOT GET READ AND YOU WILL RECEIVE A FAILING GRADE FOR THAT ASSIGNMENT. We also may not get to your assignment during the class.

BE AWARE THAT SOME ASSIGNMENTS ARE DUE THE SUNDAY MORNING BEFORE CLASS. Those are indicated as such on the following schedule. It is your responsibility to check this schedule regularly to stay on track.

IMPORTANT NOTE: always bring a printed or digital copy of everyone's scenes to class, as you may be called upon to participate in a cold reading of certain passages. Nothing drives a point home to a writer like hearing his / her words read back aloud!

SESSION #1:

DATE: 8/22

OBJECTIVE: Overview of the class, syllabus & schedule.

CONTENT: Instructor intro. Students then introduce themselves. What is a story?

EXERCISE: Premise analysis of a clip, time permitting (per team)

ASSIGNMENT: n/a

DEADLINE: n/a

TURN IN: n/a

SESSION #2:

DATE: 8/29

CONTENT: Discussion of main character roles and goals

EXERCISE: Using a news story, assign main character roles and goals

ASSIGNMENT: Atmosphere

DEADLINE: Monday, 9/12 (next class)

TURN IN: Bring to class a digital or printed copy you can read aloud.

NOTE: No class next Monday (Labor Day). Next class: Monday 9/12

SESSION #3:

DATE: 9/12

CONTENT: Atmosphere feedback. Conciseness of screenwriting style.
Theme, Goals, Conflict, Obstacles, Change

EXERCISE: Roots of Inner Need

ASSIGNMENT: Apply these notions to short silent film idea.

DEADLINE: n/a

TURN IN: n/a

SESSION #4:

DATE: 9/19

CONTENT: Writing from personal experience. Transforming reality into a story.

EXERCISE: Personal story. Then turn personal story into a fictional one.

ASSIGNMENT: Preparation for a date – except it happens in an unusual location

DEADLINE: Monday, 9/26 (next class)

TURN IN: Bring to class a digital or printed copy you can read aloud.

SESSION #5:

- DATE: 9/26
- CONTENT: Feedback on date scenes, read aloud
Discussion of character concepts.
- EXERCISE: Building a character together from a headline
- ASSIGNMENT: Character profile (from an obituary. Bring the obit)
- DEADLINE: Monday, 10/3 (next class)
- TURN IN: Bring to class a digital or printed copy you can read aloud.

SESSION #6:

- DATE: 10/3
- CONTENT: Character profile feedback
- EXERCISE: Improv
- ASSIGNMENT: Silent short script (MIDTERM). Then read and prepare feedback for everyone else's work in time for next class.
- DEADLINE: For your own short script: Sunday, 10/9, 10:00 am
- TURN IN: **VIA EMAIL to Instructor (scriptsystem@gmail.com) and Group**
- DEADLINE: For your notes on others' scripts: Monday, 10/10 (next class)
- TURN IN: Bring written notes on others' scripts to class.

SESSION #7:

DATE: 10/10

CONTENT: Feedback and discussion of everyone's MidTerm script
Discussion of structural concepts

EXERCISE: Using a news item, we build a story together

ASSIGNMENT: n/a

SESSION #8:

DATE: 10/17

CONTENT: Discussion of scene and sequence structural concepts

EXERCISE: Breaking down the structure of a scene from news item

ASSIGNMENT: Scene: Two people wake up...

DEADLINE: Monday, 10/24 (next class)

TURN IN: **BRING 4 COPIES** to class or email it to the group so it can be read aloud

SESSION #9:

DATE: 10/24

CONTENT: Feedback on Two People scene.
Dialogue

EXERCISE: Jargon

ASSIGNMENT: Prepare pitch for final script idea

DEADLINE: Monday, 10/31 (next class)

TURN IN: Come to class ready to pitch.

SESSION #10:

DATE: 10/31

CONTENT: Pitch of your idea for the final script of 10-20 pages with dialogue. Keep the pitch under 5 minutes.

ASSIGNMENT: Character profile for the main character of your final script.

DEADLINE: Monday, 11/7 (next class)

SESSION #11:

DATE: 11/7

CONTENT: Character profile feedback.

ASSIGNMENT: Treatment of your idea for the final script. 5 pages or less. Then read and prepare feedback for everyone else's work in time for next class.

DEADLINE: For your own Treatment: **Sunday, 11/13, 10:00 am**

TURN IN: **VIA EMAIL to Instructor** (scriptsystem@gmail.com) **and Group**

DEADLINE: For your notes: Monday, 11/14 (next class)

TURN IN: Bring written notes to class.

SESSION #12:

DATE: 11/14

CONTENT: Treatment feedback.

ASSIGNMENT: First Draft of final script. 10-20 pages. Then read and prepare feedback for everyone else's work in time for next class.

DEADLINE: For your own First Draft: **Sunday, 11/20, 10:00 am**

TURN IN: **VIA EMAIL to Instructor** (scriptsystem@gmail.com) **and Group**

DEADLINE: For your notes: Monday, 11/21 (next class)

TURN IN: Bring written notes to class.

SESSION #13:

- DATE: 11/21
- CONTENT: First Draft Feedback
- ASSIGNMENT: FINAL DRAFT of final script. 10-20 pages. Then read and prepare feedback for everyone else's work in time for next class.
- DEADLINE: For your own Final Draft: Sunday, 11/27, 10:00 am
- TURN IN: **VIA EMAIL to Instructor** (scriptsystem@gmail.com) **and Group**
- DEADLINE: For your notes: Monday, 11/28 (last class)
- TURN IN: Bring written notes to class.

SESSION #14:

- DATE: 11/28x
- CONTENT: Final Draft Feedback
- ASSIGNMENT: Enjoy the Holidays!

STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC CONDUCT AND SUPPORT SYSTEMS**ACADEMIC CONDUCT**

Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Section 11, Behavior Violating University Standards <https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You

are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* <http://equity.usc.edu/> or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage sarc@usc.edu describes reporting options and other resources.

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

A number of USC's schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. *The Office of Disability Services and Programs* http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* <http://emergency.usc.edu/> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

DISRUPTIVE STUDENT BEHAVIOR

Behavior that persistently or grossly interferes with classroom activities is considered disruptive behavior and may be subject to disciplinary action. Such behavior inhibits other students' ability to learn and an instructor's ability to teach. A student responsible for disruptive behavior may be required to leave class pending discussion and resolution of the problem and may be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action.

PLEASE NOTE:

**FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE NOT PERMITTED IN ANY
INSTRUCTIONAL SPACES IN THE CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX**